From Epistemology to Methodology

This bite is the first of a series of seven documents that offer a first introduction to the approaches that will be adapted to the homelessness field along with the HOOD's project life: the Dialogical Approach and the Enabling Coplanning. They discuss topics ranging from epistemology at the basis of the approaches, the core principles of the two methodologies mentioned, and the key elements that characterized them. Overall, they facilitate the progressive comprehension of the two approaches considered, also providing tips for further readings.

At the theoretical level, the Dialogic Approach stands at the intersection between Gregory Bateson's thoughts, specifically regarding the reflections discussed in Steps to an Ecology of Mind, and the writing of the Russian philosopher, Michail Bachtin. In a nutshell, Dialogic Practices is based on the construction of a transformative dialogue within a social network. Bachtin's ideas are embraced to define the deeply constructivist nature of this kind of communication. The dialogue among professionals, those in difficulty and others within the network is not about a particular situation, an episode, a personality's profile "outside" it; rather, the dialogue itself is the place for defining and redefining the object and meaning of the interaction. Thus, these practices refer to something that differs from the usual dialogue between the practitioner and the person, typically based on a positivist approach. Indeed, in the traditional model, the practitioner has to collect information related to an "objective" condition, situation, reality. Instead, the Dialogic Practices adopt Bachtin's proposal to use the dialogue itself to shape information within a shared field.

According to this principle, Bachtin developed the concept of "polyphony of the word", essential to understanding the dialogic approach. According to Bachtin, the polyphonic word is "built up in layers": indeed, the meaning does not exist before, but is generated by the succession of various actors' interventions in the dialogue. The interlocutor who contributes to constructing the discourse space is not only the one who is physically present but can also be interior. The resonance of inner and outer voices consists in what Bachtin called a "polyphonic society of people and personalities": they are all present in the dialogue and contribute to shaping a shared meaning. From the positivist approach the traditional model of intervention is derived, in which the professional tends to treat as a "noise" the various voices emerging during the talk because they aim at obtaining "right" and "final" information. It is from constructivist epistemology that the dialogic model comes, which considers the discourse developed in the talk as a core part of the process in the construction of the meaning. In this case, the professional does not aim to reach an objective description of the situation but to assist the other in reconstructing the sense of their existential path.

Further reading: Bateson G. (1977), *Steps to an Ecology of Mind,* Cambridge, The University of Chicago Press.

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